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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 THE HAGUE 002585

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/22/2015

TAGS: [MARR](#) [PREL](#) [NL](#) [MOPS](#)

SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS: ASD FLORY'S VISIT TO THE HAGUE

REF: A. THE HAGUE 2434

[1](#)B. THE HAGUE 2565

[1](#)C. THE HAGU...

41221,9/23/2005 13:37,05THEHAGUE2585,"Embassy The Hague",CONFIDENTIAL,05THEHAGUE2377|05THEHAGUE2434|05THEHAGUE2436|05THEHAGUE2565,"This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text

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[1](#)D. THE HAGUE 2377

Classified By: Charge D'Affaires Chat Blakeman;

reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Your trip to the Netherlands comes at a time when Prime Minister Jean-Pieter Balkenende's coalition government faces the lowest poll figures in Dutch history. Much of the public and parliamentary criticism focuses on the government's ambitious economic reform programs, but Dutch military deployments overseas (including in ISAF III and NTM-I) and the government's commitment to the Joint Strike Fighter program are also controversial. The national budget released on September 20 provides moderately increased funds for the Defense Ministry, reversing a decade-long decline. Under Defense Minister Henk Kamp, the Dutch MOD has recently reorganized to streamline decision-making and to increase the deployability of Dutch forces. Your Defense and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) interlocutors are likely to seek your views on proposals for NATO transformation. Should your schedule allow a visit to the HMS Van Amstel, you will want to thank Defense Minister Kamp and the frigate's crew for their hard work and timely assistance in support of Hurricane Katrina relief efforts.

Unpopular Balkenende Government

[1](#)2. (C) The Balkenende government has fallen on tough times. A September 16 poll indicated that if national elections were held today, Balkenende's coalition would poll only 23.9 percent, down from 28.6 percent in 2003. At the same time, the popularity of the opposition party Labor (PvdA) is increasing, drawing 31.2 percent of today's voters (up from 27.3 percent in 2003). With the national elections scheduled for May 2007, many assume a new government will come to power headed by a more Euro-centric Labor party. Labor was highly critical of Dutch participation in Iraq, and has raised difficult questions in parliament regarding the deployment of special forces in support of the Afghan elections. They are generally supportive of Dutch participation in ISAF. Labor also actively opposed the Dutch government's involvement in developing the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF), although it does not necessarily oppose the purchase of the finished aircraft. Balkenende's government has pinned its hopes on turning around the struggling Dutch economy through an ambitious -- and controversial -- economic reform program, but many observers consider this a long shot. All parties are now gearing up for municipal elections scheduled for March 2006, which are widely viewed as a preview of the 2007 national elections.

2006 Defense Budget Plans

[1](#)3. (C) The Ministry of Defense came out fairly strong in the September 20 presentation of the 2006 defense budget plans. Since 1994, the MOD has given up approximately 1.2 billion Euros in cuts. This year's budget sees a slight raise from 2005 (7.67 to 7.78 billion Euros) and includes funds to procure new equipment. This follows a massive ministry reorganization involving service command consolidation and staff cuts (ref A). During a September 20 press conference, Defense Minister Kamp emphasized the need to continue to adapt to a changing security situation or risk becoming vulnerable. MOD State Secretary Cees van der Knaap announced plans to buy two C-130s (54 million Euros) and five new Chinook helicopters adapted for special forces missions from the USG. The Dutch also intend to develop their armed forces into a "full-fledged national security organization," including making 3,000 troops permanently available for civil

authorities in response to crisis situations. The MOD also will develop counter-terrorism plans to protect airspace and harbors.

ISAF Stage III

14. (C) As reported ref B, the Dutch government is expected to make a positive decision by the end of October to deploy 1,000 - 1,200 troops to Uruzghan province in Afghanistan in support of ISAF Stage III. MOD contacts hope parliamentary approval of the decision will follow shortly thereafter. Prior fulfillment of certain "pre-conditions" will help convince parliament, especially given concerns recently raised by the Labor Party. Such pre-conditions include securing U.S. intelligence and logistics support, establishing a PRT partnership with Australia, and cost-sharing to renovate Kandahar airport. The Dutch have suggested that a pitch by the USG might help convince Australia to team with the Netherlands in Uruzghan, and may raise this and possible U.S. intelligence and logistics support to the Dutch PRT during your meetings.

NATO Transformation

15. (C) As reported ref C, Defense Minister Kamp took seriously NATO SYG de Hoop Scheffer's request to think outside the box on NATO transformation issues. During the recent informal NATO defense ministerial in Berlin, Kamp presented an 11-point paper that emphasized an expanded role for the NATO Response Force (NRF), a greater NATO role in maritime security, a major policy change in favor of European missile defense, and increased NATO coordination with the EU, UN, and the African Union. Foreign Minister Bot has expressed similar views in recent public speeches on the need to transform NATO into a more effective political decision-making entity. Dutch interlocutors have been generally supportive of Washington's "two summit" approach focusing a first mini-summit in 2006 on transformation and a second in 2008 on enlargement. The Dutch have gently pushed for a greater US role in the NRF, and may raise this during your meetings.

Force Protection for NTM-I

16. (C) As reported ref D, the Dutch are willing to contribute up to 100 persons to participate in the NATO Training Mission in Iraq provided other Allies and partners also are willing to increase their participation. To date, the Dutch have offered 25 persons for NTM-I; only 15 persons are currently deployed in Iraq. MFA and MOD contacts have indicated that the possibility of Dutch contributions to force protection for NTM-I is a non-starter, especially given the expected contentious debate in parliament over Dutch participation in ISAF Stage III.

JSF

17. (C) JSF is one of the most important issues we face in the Netherlands; your Dutch interlocutors may raise it during your meetings. The Dutch have agreed to contribute \$800 million to participate in the system development and demonstration phase, and now face a decision next year to purchase the fighter. The current government and the Air Force wholeheartedly support the purchase, but Labor is dragging its heels. Questions involving program delays and the Quadrennial Defense Review have complicated the issue. The CEO of Lockheed-Martin will visit the Netherlands the first week of October, officially "to strengthen the trans-Atlantic relationship" but also to build the case in favor of the purchase.

HMS Van Amstel

18. (C) The HMS van Amstel is planning to return to the Netherlands the day of your visit. The Van Amstel has been at sea for six months on counter-narcotics operations in the Caribbean, and was on its way back the Netherlands when Hurricane Katrina struck. The Van Amstel changed course, heading toward the hurricane-affected area, and was key in providing timely assistance to the Biloxi area. The Van Amstel had considerable press coverage here in the Netherlands; Charge hosted a press conference on Dutch hurricane assistance in which he described the personnel aboard the Van Amstel as heroes. Your participation in the small ceremony greeting the return of the Van Amstel's crew will go a long way in showing our appreciation to the Dutch for their hard work and timely assistance. It also presents an opportunity to meet Defense Minister Kamp.

Other Meetings

19. (U) We also have scheduled meetings with Pieter de Gooijer (Deputy Director-General for Political Affairs, MFA), and Lo Casteleijn (Director, General Policy Affairs, MOD). We are awaiting word from Rob Swartbol's office (Advisor to the Prime Minister) regarding his availability.

Van Der Knaap Trip to Washington

110. (C) MOD State Secretary Van Der Knaap plans to travel to Washington next month. Lo Casteleijn has described van der Knaap as politically savvy, and influential on the JSF decision. You should ask Casteleijn for his views on how to engage with Van Der Knaap during his trip to Washington.
BLAKEMAN